

In Nomine Jesu

He Went Out, Bearing His Own Cross

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you taken the time to think about that greeting? It is almost verbatim the greeting that Paul gives Timothy in both of his letters to the young man. Pastor and I use greetings like this in order to show that we are following what we have been taught by those who came before us. Paul teaches nothing else if not that grace, mercy, and peace are ours *because* of what we are celebrating today.

Even Christians can admit though that it is an odd thing to celebrate the death of your God. Just like it is an odd thing to eat His body and drink His blood as you might have heard about last night. Our God is most certainly unique among the many gods that have been worshipped in the history of the world. First of all, He's the only One that's real. Another thing that makes our God the most unique is that He requires nothing from you. Not only that, He provides everything for you.

Today you celebrate the day that our God proved to you how much He loved you. Today is Good Friday, and it is most certainly a good day for us indeed. Today you celebrate the fact that God provided you with the thing that you needed most. Nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus provided you with the Sacrifice that would end all sacrifices. He gave His life in place of yours. Because of what He did for you, you now have a place with Him in paradise.

Today is a joyful day to be sure, but today you also recognize the pain and suffering that our Lord persevered in order to accomplish your salvation for you. God, who never would have suffered death if it hadn't been for you, was tortured and executed on your behalf. Therefore, while you rejoice that Jesus has saved you from sin, death and the devil, you also honor and respect the torment that He had to bear in order to complete His task. Hear now as our text declares how our Lord wins your salvation:

So they took Jesus, and He went out, bearing His own cross to the place called the place of a skull, and which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified Him, and with Him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.¹

Jesus bore His cross. This is depicted here on our walls with the second Station of the Cross. Of course you are free to recognize that this cross was the wooden cross beam that Jesus' hands would soon be nailed to. But you are also free to see a deeper meaning, referring to the burden of your sin. As Jesus was trudging toward Golgotha to be crucified, He was carrying more than just wood. He was carrying your sin. He was carrying your old selves. He was carrying all of humanity.

Some would refuse to let Him do this. Some would try and carry their own burdens. Maybe they believe that they don't need Jesus. Maybe they believe that they are saving Jesus some small amount of suffering by taking responsibility for their own sin. Maybe they simply aren't aware that Jesus is willing to carry their trespasses for them.

If you fall into any of those categories, know this: Jesus is the only way to the Father that doesn't end in you being in Hell. Jesus is the only

¹ John 19:16b-18 (ESV)

gate that leads to Heaven and life eternal. That gate hinges on His crucifixion where He suffered the brutality and execution you deserve. Don't refuse to allow Jesus to save you. He is the only way that you will be saved, and it requires nothing of you.

The chief priests of the Jews refused to recognize Jesus as the Messiah that He was. In the process of doing this, they even denied their God. They said they have no King but Caesar, rather than God as they should have. Now they try to deny Jesus His rightful title as well:

Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'the King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."²

Whether Pilate knew it or not, he declared the truth to all those who saw Jesus on the cross. Jesus truly was and is the King of the Jews. Pilate may have given the order, but it was the Jews themselves that had made sure that Jesus was crucified. They executed their own King.

In an ironic turn of events, it was this very execution that led to their salvation. Truly, if they would repent, recognize the evil that they had done and see Jesus for who He truly was, then they would be forgiven. They would even be forgiven for this most heinous act of killing God Himself.

But they refused to acknowledge the truth that Pilate had written. They would not see Him as their King and God. They rejected His

² John 19:20-22 (ESV)

forgiveness. They could only see Him as a troublemaker and a blasphemer who only claimed to be a King.

You, however, see the truth. You know that Jesus is King, not only of the Jews, but of all humanity. He is King of the entire universe. And He is hanging on a cross, dying. The vast majority of images depicting this event portray Jesus as having a cloth wrapped around His waist. Historically though, He would have been completely naked. He died naked in *our* sins, wearing nothing to cover Him from the Father's wrath at our sins:

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took His garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also His tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided the garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots."³

Jesus fulfilled all prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah. You can see the image of this here in the Fifth Station of the Cross. The stripping of Jesus is just one example of that fulfillment. But again I ask you to look deeper than the surface meaning. There will come a day when you all who are the Faithful will be wearing white robes. You will be among the saints dressed in white. You will be wearing the symbol of holiness and righteousness that Jesus earned for you.

He earned that righteousness for you by wearing your sins. Rather than wearing the robe of His own righteousness, He voluntarily gave it up that you might be clothed in it. He took on your sin and your guilt as His robe. He wore them even on the cross. He allowed all of this in order to

³ John 19:23-24 (ESV)

make sure that you would be free to wear the white robes of salvation, robes which have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb.

Not all of the people who were at the crucifixion were His enemies. Some knew Who He truly was as you do. One of them had even birthed and raised Him:

So the soldiers did these things, but standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.⁴

Even while taking care of His heavenly responsibilities, Jesus does not forget about His earthly duties. Jesus follows the fourth commandment. He ensures that His mother will be taken care of by a man who He trusts. As you hear this you are free to recognize that Jesus does not fulfill your spiritual needs at the expense of your earthly needs.

Jesus cares for you as a whole person. He cares about your soul. He cares about your body. He cares about your mind. Jesus knows as well as you do that when the body suffers so does the mind and soul. He lived in human flesh here on earth with us. He knows what it is to have a body that needs food and water. He knows what it is to get tired. He knows all of these things, and He does not scoff at you because of your physical needs.

Your Lord created you to be physical beings. He also created you to be spiritual beings. Jesus dying on the cross took care of your most dire spiritual need. One day in the future, when you pass through the doorway

⁴ John 19:24b-27 (ESV)

that is death in the Faith, He will permanently take care of all of your physical needs as well. That being said, our Lord has His own physical cares to worry about as well, as He hangs on the cross.

After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scriptures), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to His mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished." And He bowed His head and gave up His Spirit."⁵

Remember what your Lord said on the night in which He was betrayed. He prophesied, *"For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes."*⁶ Jesus just partook of the fruit of the vine. This can only mean that the Kingdom of God has indeed come. Your Salvation has come.

And, just in case you need another sign, the sour wine was delivered to Jesus on the hyssop branch. This branch is what was used in the religious ceremonies to sprinkle the cleansing blood or water onto the Israelites. I will leave it to you to remember when else wine and blood were tied together.

But our Lord, knowing that sometimes Christians are weak in their use of the Faith, states it simply for you. *"It is finished."* With these words, your Lord tells you that you have been saved. He has won. His victory has saved you. He has defeated the devil, the world and your own sinful nature. As He gives up His Spirit, He accomplishes what He came to do.

Your victory was won for you through harshest tortures and an execution that is simply horrendous. But know this: It was through these

⁵ John 19:28-30 (ESV)

⁶ Luke 22:18 (ESV)

sufferings that you were won. It was through this outpouring of God's wrath onto His own Son that Jesus snatched you from the jaws of eternal damnation. This was not an easy victory by any means, but the victory it was. Jesus gave up His spirit, He died, for you. And because of that fact, you now will live with Him forever.

Now may the peace which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Good Friday Chief Service
April 3, 2015

Psalm 31; Isaiah 52:13-53:12; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21; John 18:1-19:42

Vicar Christopher M. Craig

Soli Deo Gloria